

Introduction

The information age has changed how literacy can be defined. Broadband access, along with other technologies, is changing the world and the information within it (Headrick, 2000; Williams, 1997; Mason, 1986). Tools used in learning and literacy are evolving at an incredible rate (Baron, 1999; Bruce, 2001; Bruce, Michaels, & Watson-Gegeo, 1985). Many would argue that a single definition could not encompass what literacy in the information age is. Further, the conceptual idea of literacy and information is continually evolving. Some would say that literacy is contextual and similar to constructivism, as each situation requires unique and interdependent skills.

Winner (1986) suggests:

No idea is more provocative in controversies about technology and society than the notion that technical things have political qualities. At issue is the claim that the machines, structures, and systems of modern material culture can be accurately judged not only for their contributions to efficiency and productivity and their positive and negative environmental side effects, but also for the ways in which they can embody specific forms of power and authority.

Being literate, in many situations, also affords one power; the power of information can be life changing. For example, where does one obtain the information needed to vote - from a friend, post office, blog, wiki, newspaper, magazine, radio, television, or flyer? And possibly more important, who is distributing the information about a potential candidate? In many communities, local information is deemed more trustworthy than cooperate sources. Understanding and being able to disseminate information in a vast array of contexts is essential to staying literate.

Definition

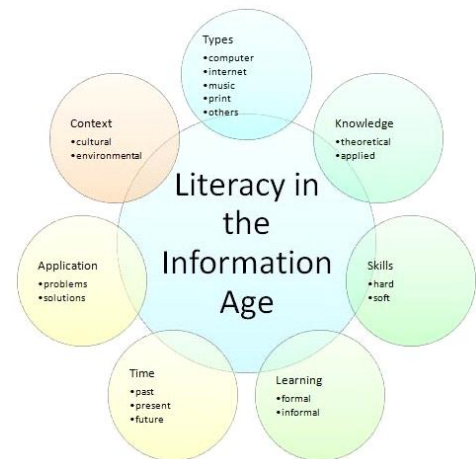
Literacy in the information age can be defined as the ability to acquire and utilize knowledge, skills, and other resources to facilitate learning. The development of literacy in the information age is the result of reflecting on past learned literacy for solutions to current and future questions (Devers, 2007).

Context

Cultural and environmental factors are critical in literacy. One may be considered literate in one specific context, but illiterate in another. Knowing how to find and use information within the correct environment is vital to staying literate. It is also important to recognize that many ideas, words, actions, etc. have different meanings throughout the world, time, and space. In America it is common for wedding dresses to be either white or pearl, but in many Asian cultures, wedding dresses are red.

Application

Along with being literate, one also needs to be able to apply one's knowledge to solutions when problems arise. Further, the application of one's literacy could, and most likely



will, be different in each situation. The ability to understand something oftentimes is not sufficient to apply it. The aptitude to apply one's knowledge to unique and new situations requires practice that will lead to improved literacy and learning opportunities throughout life.

Time

As time progresses, one's literacy will continue to evolve and mature. Throughout one's life, he or she should apply learned literacy to the present and plan for future learning and growth. Time and practice have the ability to alter one's perception and proficiency in applying learned literacy. Oftentimes, one must reflect on past learning to understand current situations and adapt to the future. For example, there has been a dramatic change in the way we use the telephone over the past ten years.

Learning

Literacy does not have to be obtained in a formal educational setting, and many times is learned in an informal environment. Many learned literacies are not learned in a formal setting. How office politics work is one example. This complex social context has a dramatic influence on the tone and productivity level of many offices. Having the ability to link past learned social and contextual experiences is often critical to one's success in an office setting.

Skills

Both hard and soft skills are important in literacy. Being able to work with others and having the skills to implement literacy in a given situation are important to literacy development. Proper social interaction is vital in adapting and applying one's learned literacy. Simply being able to complete a task is often not enough, but rather one needs to work well with others in complex environments to apply learned literacy.

Knowledge

Theoretical and applied knowledge are both paramount in literacy maturity. Combining the two affords one the ability to practice learned literacy with a well developed understanding of why one approach may be superior to another. Theory offers wonderful solutions, but often when implemented, requires tweaking in each situation. The simple task of changing one's car tire is relatively straightforward. But add the complexities of snow, rain, dirt, sand, rust, uneven pavement, passing traffic, and the theory of changing a tire becomes stressed with many additional outside environmental factors.

Types

1. Computer: work, home, digital lifestyle, etc.
2. Internet: research, communication, entertainment, etc.
3. Music: reading, writing, etc.
4. Print: reading, writing, etc.
5. Other: mechanical, social, etc.

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